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# Case-Valuation and the Phasehood of Japanese Causatives

Yuki Tagi

## 1. Introduction

Under the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2008), the theory of the phase has been developed by Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2004, 2008), among many others. The issue of defining phases has also attracted the attention of numerous linguists. Chomsky (2000, 2001, 2004, 2008) define CP and accusative  $v^*P$ <sup>1</sup> as phases. However, several alternative proposals for the definition of phases have been advanced by Bošković (2014), Takahashi (2010). In this paper, I will assume with Takahashi (2010) that Case-valuation determines the phasehood of functional categories.

The purpose of this paper is to present a slight modification to Takahashi's (2010) analysis of Japanese causatives. More precisely, I will argue that matrix  $vPs$ <sup>2</sup> do not constitute a phase. This argument is supported by the syntactic distribution of indeterminate pronouns in Japanese. It has been argued that an indeterminate element must be associated syntactically with a particle *mo* (Kishimoto 2001, Hiraiwa 2005b,a, Takahashi 2018). Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) a. Ken-ga nani-o kai-mo si-nakat-ta.  
Ken-NOM what-ACC buy-PAST-MO do-NEG-PAST  
'Ken didn't buy anything.'
- b. Dare-ga sono-kaban-o kai-mo si-nakat-ta.  
who-NOM the-bag-ACC buy-MO do-NEG-PAST  
'Nobody bought the bag.'

Here, the subject indeterminate phrases cannot be associated with *mo* attached to a verb because the subject position is not a domain in which the indeterminate subject and particle can be associated with each other. On the other hand, the object is properly associated with *mo* since it is in the domain of *mo*.

In particular, it has also been argued that indeterminate pronouns must be licensed in a phase-based manner (see Hiraiwa 2005b,a, Takahashi 2018). For example, a finite-CP, which is a phase, cannot intervene between the indeterminate element and *mo*:

- (2) \* boku-wa Taro-ga [ Hanako-ga dare-ni at-ta to ] sinjitei-ta to-mo  
I-TOP Taro-NOM Hanako-NOM who-DAT meet-PAST C believe-PAST C-MO  
omow-anakat-ta.  
think-NEG-PAST

<sup>1</sup>For a unified treatment, I will denote  $v^*P$  by  $vP$  hereafter even though it values accusative-Case.

<sup>2</sup>In this paper, I will denote  $vP$  that introduces causative VP as "matrix  $vP$ ."

‘I didn’t think that Taro believes that Hanako met anyone.’

(slightly modified from Hiraiwa 2005b:175)

According to Hiraiwa (2005b,a), the dative indeterminate is too far from *mo* because they are separated by the phase boundary. These data suggest that the intervention of a phase head prevents the indeterminate pronoun from being associated with *mo*. Thus, indeterminate pronoun licensing must be phase-bound. In this paper, I will argue that the syntactic distributions of indeterminate pronouns pose a serious problem for Takahashi’s (2010) analysis of Japanese causative constructions.

This paper proceeds as follows. In Section. 2, I provide a review of previous research on determining the phasehood of functional heads. In Section 3, I present an empirical problem of previous research on the analysis of Japanese causatives and argue that a slight modification is necessary. In order to solve the problems presented in Section 3, in Section 4 I present a slight modification of the analysis of Japanese causatives and argue that the matrix *v* of causatives is not a phase. Section 5 concludes this paper.

## 2. Phasehood and Scope Facts of Nominative/Accusative Objects

In this section, I will review Takahashi’s (2010) proposal regarding phasehood and explanation of the relevant data. He proposes that Case-valuation determines the phasehood of functional heads and that quantifier raising (QR) is executed in a phase-bound manner. Takahashi’s (2010) important contribution is that his analysis accommodates the scope asymmetry between nominative and accusative objects in Japanese potential constructions in a principled manner. Building on Nomura’s (2003, 2005a,b)’s observation, Takahashi assumes that nominative objects scope either over or under the potential suffix while accusative objects only take narrow scope:

- (3) a. Taroo-ga koyubi-ga mage-rare-ru no-wa sit-te-itaga, (kare-ga)  
 Taro-NOM pinkie-NOM crook-can-PRES that-TOP know-PROG-PAST-but, (he-NOM)  
 kusuriyubi-dake-ga mage-rare-ru no-ni-wa odoro-ita  
 ring.finger-only-NOM crook-can-PRES that-DAT-TOP surprise-PAST  
 ‘I have known that Taro can crook only his pinkie but I am surprised that he can also crook his ring finger.’

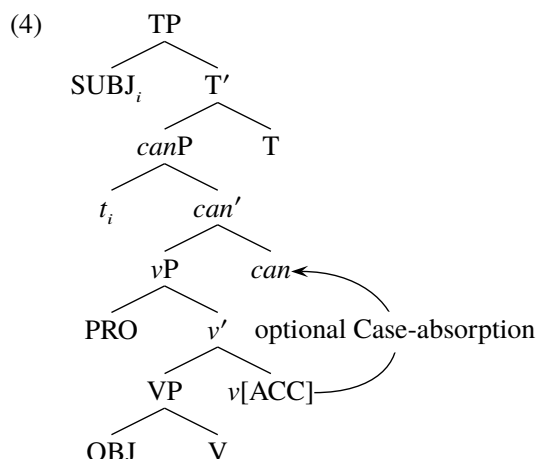
(#only>can, can>only)

(Nomura 2005a:176)

- b. Taroo-ga koyubi-dake-o mage-rare-ru.  
 Taro-NOM pinkie-only-ACC crook-can-PRES  
 ‘Taro can crook only his pinkie’

(\*only>can, can>only)

Takahashi (2010) assigns the following structure to (3):



(Takahashi 2010:337)

Following Ura (1996, 1999, 2000), Takahashi assumes that the potential suffix *can* optionally absorbs Case-features of *v*. If *can* absorbs the Case-features of *v*, the object is nominative-marked, and if *can* does not do so, the object is accusative-marked by *v*. Regarding scope facts, Takahashi's important claim is that this is not due to Case-related A-movement to SPEC-TP of the nominative object in (3a), scoping over the potential suffix (cf. Koizumi 1994, 1995, 1998, Tada 1992, among many others), but rather to QR of *dake* (cf. Cecchetto 2004, Fox 2000, Miyagawa 2011, Saito 2005). The impossibility of the wide scope of the accusative object in (3b) over the potential suffix, on the other hand, is because the *vP* is involved in Case-valuation, functioning as a phase, and thus *dake* within the object can only raise to the *vP*.

Takahashi (2010) further extends his analysis to Japanese causative constructions. Crucially, he assumes that the matrix *v* of Japanese causatives is involved in the Case-valuation of the internal argument:

- (5) a. John-ga eego-?o/ga wakar-u  
 John-NOM English-ACC/NOM understand-PRES  
 'John understands English.'
- b. Mary-ga John-ni eego-o/\*ga wakar-ase-ru.  
 Mary-NOM John-DAT English-ACC/NOM understand-cause-PRES  
 'Mary makes John understand English.'

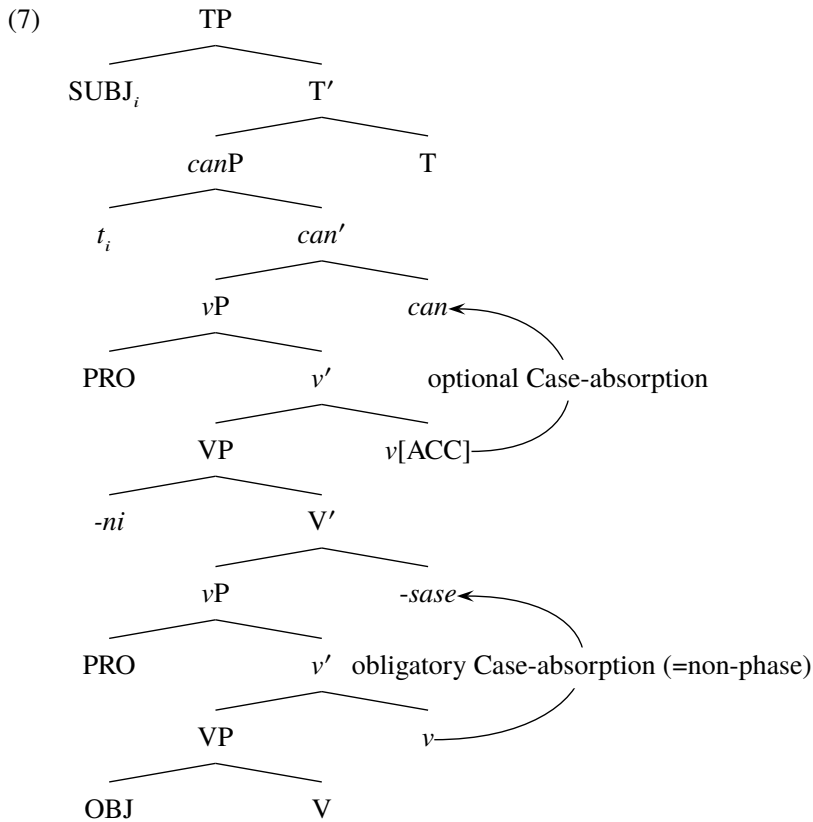
(*ibid*:338)

Here, the accusative-marked object in (5a) is not acceptable while its nominative counterpart is fully grammatical. On the other hand, the object in (5b) is fully ungrammatical when it is nominative-marked. This contrast, according to Takahashi (2010), suggests that embedded object in (5a) is nominative-marked by T and that the object in (5b) is accusative-marked by the matrix *v*.

Keeping this argument in mind, let us consider the scope facts of nominative/accusative objects and Japanese causatives:

- (6) a. Hanako-ni(wa) saru-ni migite-dake-ga age-sase-rare-ta.  
 Hanako-DAT(TOP) monkey-DAT right.hand-only-NOM raise-cause-can-PAST  
 ‘Hanako could make a monkey raise only his right hand.’  
 (only>can, can>only)
- b. Hanako-ga saru-ni migite-dake-o age-sase-rare-ta.  
 Hanako-NOM monkey-DAT right.hand-only-ACC raise-cause-can-PAST  
 ‘Hanako could make a monkey raise his right hand without raising his left hand.’  
 (?\*only>can, can>only)
- (slightly modified from Takahashi 2010:327-328)

The structure of Japanese causatives is represented in the following way:



(*ibid*:339)

The causative affix *-sase* obligatorily absorbs the Case-feature of the embedded *v*. Due to this absorption, the embedded *vP* loses its status as a phase altogether. The absorption by *-rare* ‘can’, on the other hand, is optional (cf. Ura 1996, 1999, 2000). If *-rare* absorbs the Case-feature of the matrix *v*, then *T* nominative-marks the object of the embedded *V*. The matrix *v* accusative-marks its object only if *-rare* does not absorb its Case-feature. The scope patterns are accounted for just as we have seen: *dake* within the accusative object cannot scope over *-rare* since the matrix *vP* is a phase, which prevents it from undergoing

QR over it, while a nominative object scopes over *-rare* because the matrix  $\nu P$  is not a phase and does not prevent the QR of *dake* within the object.

To summarize this section, we have mainly seen that Case-valuation is involved in determining the phasehood of functional categories and that QR is phase-bound. By assuming that phasehood depends on Case-valuation, Takahashi (2010) has provided a principled account of long-puzzling scope facts of nominative/accusative objects.

### 3. The Phasehood of Japanese Causatives and Indeterminate Pronouns

In this section, we will reconsider the mechanism of the Case-valuation of Japanese causatives under Takahashi's (2010) analysis and the empirical problem that arises from it. Recall that the matrix  $\nu P$  of the causatives is responsible for valuing the Case of its internal argument. Let us consider (5), repeated in (8):

- (8) a. John-ga eego-?o/ga wakar-u  
b. Mary-ga John-ni eego-o/\*ga wakar-ase-ru.

As discussed in the previous section, the embedded objects in (8) are Case-valued by the matrix predicate. In particular, (8b) is accusative-marked by the matrix  $\nu$ .

Given Takahashi's analysis, we are lead to the conclusion that the phasehood of the matrix  $\nu$  of a causative is maintained unless its Case-feature is absorbed by another predicative head, e.g., *can*-head (cf Ura 1996, 1999, 2000). I will however argue that this conclusion is not correct by examining the syntactic behavior of Japanese indeterminate pronouns.

As pointed out at the outset of this paper, Japanese indeterminate pronouns must be licensed in a phase-bound manner:

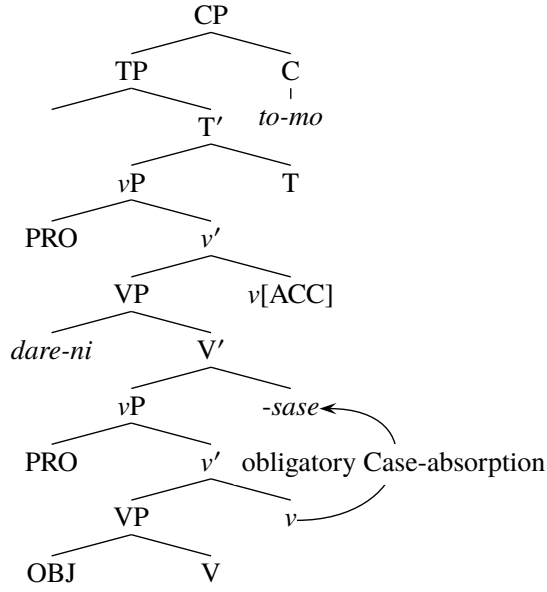
- (9) \* boku-wa Taroo-ga [ Hanako-ga dare-ni at-ta to ] sinjitei-ta to-mo omow-anakat-ta.

The deviance of this sentence is due to the existence of the most deeply embedded complementizer, which is a phase-head. (9) suggests that no phase-head can intervene between the particle and the indeterminate pronoun.

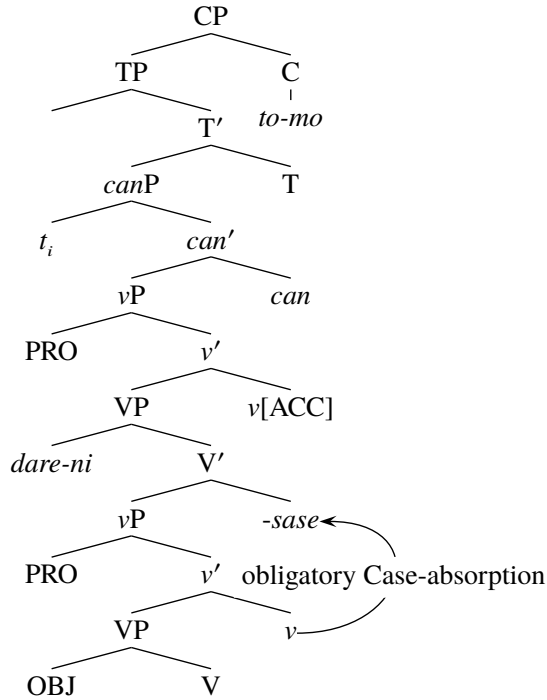
Given that indeterminate pronouns fail to be associated with the particle because of the intervention of a phase-head, the matrix  $\nu$ -head of the causative, which is a phase-head, should stop *mo* from licensing an indeterminate. This prediction is not borne out:

- (10) a. Ken-ga Kyooko-ga dare-ni sono-kaban-o kaw-ase-ta to-mo omowa-nakat-ta.  
Ken-NOM Kyoko-NOM who-DAT the-bag-ACC buy-cause-PAST that-MO think-NEG-PAST  
'Ken thought Kyoko made nobody buy the bag.'  
b. Ken-ga Kyooko-ga dare-ni sono-kaban-o kaw-ase-rare-ta to-mo  
Ken-NOM Kyoko-NOM who-DAT the-bag-ACC buy-cause-can-PAST that-MO  
omowa-nakat-ta.  
think-NEG-PAST  
'Ken thought that Kyoko could make nobody buy the bag.'

(11) a.



b.



According to Takahashi (2010), the matrix *v*-head of the causative is a phase because it values accusative-Case. If Takahashi's analysis of causatives is on the right track, the data should be ruled out because the matrix *v*-head, which is a phase-head, intervenes between the *mo* attached to the complementizer and the indeterminate causee.

To summarize this section, I have argued that the conclusion of previous research is not correct by exploring the syntactic distribution of indeterminate pronouns. Although Takahashi's (2010) analysis

elegantly accommodates the scope facts, it predicts the behavior of indeterminate pronouns, which is contrary to facts. In light of the discussion in this paper, it is necessary to reconsider whether the matrix  $vP$  constitutes a phase.

#### 4. Proposal and Analysis

In this section, I will propose a slight modification of the above analysis of Japanese causatives. The relevant assumptions and proposals are presented here:

(12) Basic Assumptions (order irrelevant)

- a.  $vPs$  that value Case are phases (Takahashi 2010).
- b. *-sase* obligatorily absorbs the Case-features of the embedded  $v$  (Takahashi 2010).

(13) Proposals

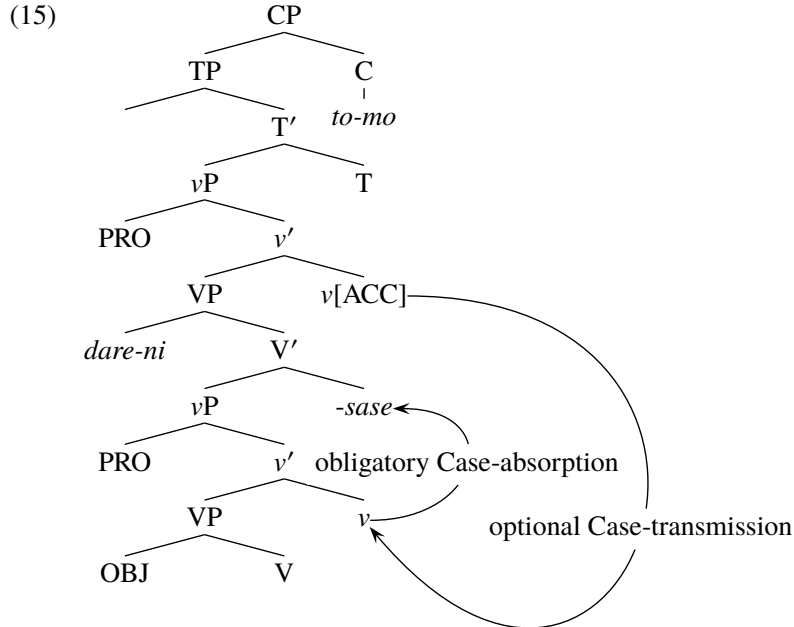
- a. The Case-features of the matrix  $v$  of causatives are optionally transmitted to the embedded  $v$  that contains the main verb.
- b. The concerned Case-feature is not enabled to value Case on internal arguments until it is transmitted to the embedded  $vP$  that contains the main verb.

With the assumptions and proposals presented here, it is predicted, departing from Takahashi (2010), that embedded  $vP$  constitutes a phase only when the matrix  $v$  transmits the Case-feature to the embedded  $v$  and that the matrix  $vP$  does not function as a phase regardless of Case-transmission because it is not involved in Case-valuation. With this discussion in mind, the problem presented in the previous section may be analyzed in the following manner:

(14) Ken-ga Kyooko-ga dare-ni sono-kaban-o kaw-ase-ta to-mo omowanakat-ta.

The structure of the sentence is assigned in the following manner:





Here, the causative morpheme *-sase* absorbs the Case-features of the embedded  $v$  (Takahashi 2010). The matrix  $v$  transmits its Case-feature to the embedded  $v$ , after which the Case-feature on the embedded  $v$  is enabled to value Case on the object, which makes this  $v$ P work as a phase. The matrix  $v$  loses its Case-feature in this transmission and does not function as a phase. If the matrix  $v$  is not a phase, no phase head intervenes between *mo* and the indeterminate causee. The sentence is thus readily accounted for.

In this section, I have presented a slight modification to Takahashi’s (2010) analysis of Japanese causatives. Departing from Takahashi (2010), I have argued that the matrix  $v$ P does not act as a phase regardless of the Case-transmission of the matrix  $v$ , and Case-valuation is thus possible only when the matrix  $v$  transmits its Case-feature to the embedded  $v$ , which enables it to function as a phase. We see in conclusion that the relevant proposals would resolve the problem discussed in the previous section.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a slight modification of Takahashi’s (2010) analysis of Japanese causatives. To this end, I explored the syntactic distribution of Japanese indeterminate pronouns. I have also shown that the analysis proposed in this paper straightforwardly accounts for the syntactic behavior of indeterminate causees.

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